

Some Outdoor Ferns for the Los Angeles Area

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Los Angeles and the nearby areas have a mild, warm climate, very rarely with any freezing temperatures, and so subtropical ferns should do well so far as temperature is concerned. Still, the humidity is low except very near the ocean, and consequently there are problems. My own garden is about 15 miles inland, with conditions similar to those that prevail throughout much of the area, even though the soil may be very different in different parts of the city. In the San Fernando Valley, which is on the inland side of the Santa Monica Mountains, the summers are hotter and the winters colder and drier, and consequently there are more difficulties, and some ferns may not grow at all without very special care.

Because of the special climatic conditions mentioned above, it is well not to try to grow ferns that don't find what they like here. Most of the ferns of Europe and the eastern United States do not do well, because they need moist, humid summers, and perhaps also a rest in a cold winter. Still, the Osmundas do fairly well in Los Angeles, although they die down completely in the winter. The sensitive fern, *Onoclea sensibilis*, and the marsh fern, *Thelypteris palustris*, do fairly well and persist more or less. The shield ferns, *Dryopteris spinulosa* and its relatives, are nice the first year, but they do not grow accustomed to our winters and eventually die.

Some of the ferns from northern California do well, especially the chain-fern, *Woodwardia fimbriata*, the sword-ferns, *Polystichum munitum* and *P. Dudleyi*, and the coast polypody, *Polypodium Scouleri*. They are never luxuriant for me, but I have seen the *Woodwardia* grown in humid regions near the coast in good soil reach a height of six feet. All these ferns like leaf mold and peat, but there is a product from the High Sierras called forest humus, which should help materially in their care when used as a mulch. It is coarse and should do much to recondition the soil.

The xerophytic ferns of southern California, *Cheilanthes*, *Notholaena*, *Pityrogramma*, and so forth, do not do well in soil, but they can be made to grow in glasshouses with special care as to water and soil.

Los Angeles is noted for its *Nephrolepis cordifolia*, which was at one time planted in front of every house. It does well, but unfortunately it is often given no care. It never dies, but it turns yellow and always looks terrible and neglected.

If one must depend on a gardener, it is best to stick to tree ferns. *Dicksonia antarctica* is a lovely tree fern, of slow growth. The *Cibotiums* are fine ferns also. The ones from Hawaii, *C. glaucum* and *C. menziesii*, are shipped here in the form of trunks that have been cut off at the ground. They are fairly easy to grow, but all that I've attempted to start in the ground, even in good soil, have lived only a year or so. The trunks are best started in small containers in leaf mold.

The *Alsophilas* are probably the most satisfactory tree ferns, and stand cold fairly well; a few cold nights will blight fronds just starting to unroll, but future fronds will be normal. But sometimes just one day of very hot weather with no humidity and perhaps a little wind, and the fronds will dry up and look as though a forest fire had passed near them. However, this does not happen in canyons and near the coast or where the fern is protected. However, heat doesn't harm the plant as the fronds to come are rolled up and protected by a covering of scales.

The Australian tree fern, *Alsophila Cooperi*, grown mistakenly for years as *A. australis*, the most commonly cultivated, is a handsome plant, but is invariably planted too close to the house so that it does not have an opportunity to grow symmetrically. Now that it is so commonly planted in front of new houses and multiple units it will be like *Nephrolepis cordifolia*, live on with the same lack of care and look yellowed and neglected. With care, *Alsophilas* thrive, and mine have gone through the roof of the lath house.

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